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Policy Debate . . . By Chalmers M. Roberts

Fulbright's Case

PLAIN speaking used to be considered a great American virtue, but nowadays it seems to be considered something just short of treason to mother, God, home and country.

Take the case of J. William Fulbright, the Arkansas Democrat who heads the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Fulbright is no senatorial powerhouse like some of his predecessors in the chairmanship but he is intelligent and he is articulate.

He employed both talents Wednesday in a lengthy foreign policy speech aimed at "myths" in the public mind—and in the Administration's mind.

He says he really was taking up the challenge of a number of Republicans who have been saying that foreign policy would be the big issue in this year's election campaign. If so, he reasoned, why not talk about policies in some key areas?

The text of the Fulbright talk had been handed out in advance but at one point when he was speaking on the Senate floor only four other Senators were on hand; two of them were paying utterly no attention and a third was presiding.

Fulbright stirred no "great debate" in the old Senate manner; his speech brought only a few comments from a handful of other senators.

Television has ruined Senate debate; Senators prefer to appear before cameras.



Roberts

FOR HIS PAINS, Fulbright was assailed yesterday for appeasement and just about everything else but witch-burning. But nobody attempted to go through an intellectual exercise on the problems of Cuba, Panama and Vietnam, or on East-West relations, as Fulbright had.

One can agree or not with Fulbright; at least he was trying to evoke a dialogue on foreign policy. The same might be said for the Vietnam neutralization speech or Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (D-Mont.) some while back; he, too, got precious little response other than abuse.

All administrations tend to resent criticism, especially when it comes from men in high positions in the same party, as in the cases of Mansfield and Fulbright. And of course it seems impossible for a foreigner to believe that such speeches are not Administration trial balloons. Yet neither of these was.

On the other hand, when an Administration official himself indulges in some blunt speaking he, too, is likely to be the target of brickbats.

That happened to Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara on Wednesday. He was honest enough to tell the House Foreign Affairs Committee that President Johnson had asked for only \$1 billion in military aid because Congress had made it "crystal clear" it wouldn't vote any bigger sum.

THE BRICKBATS obscured McNamara's point: That he felt that even with \$1 billion, which he may not get, the U.S. will have to consider the advisability of cutting the foreign forces we support and that anything less than \$1 billion "will inevitably require a reassessment of our entire policy of depending on indigenous forces in preparing our own contingency war plans . . ."

Then last night McNamara returned to the earlier Administration threat to carry the war to North Vietnam. He did so by leaving open that option, but only an option, while emphasizing what had not been sufficiently emphasized before: That regardless of such a move it is essential to concentrate on the war in the South.

Doubtless, the Secretary will be criticized for his, and the Administration's, policy in Vietnam. He rejected outright Mansfield's talk of neutralization. But, Fulbright and McNamara seem to be in general agreement.

All of these speeches amount to a disjointed American dialogue on foreign policy. Since the two men who now seem most likely to be the final contenders for the Republican presidential nomination, Richard Nixon and William Scranton, are not announced candidates they are taking only a peripheral part in the dialogue.

It is not a very satisfactory system. It would be better with fewer political insults and more thoughtful speeches. But as of now it looks like about all we are going to see unless President Johnson does agree to debate his opponent next fall.

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